



THE POLICE OFFICER'S GUIDE TO SHOOTERS



The British Association for Shooting & Conservation

The Police Officer's Guide to Shooters

According to the most recent figures there were 678,000 firearm and shotgun certificates on issue in England & Wales, with a further 76,000 in Scotland. Add to this the four million or so air rifles sold in the UK and you can see that there is every chance that during your duties as a police officer you will encounter a sporting shooter.

This guide sets out - very briefly - to give you some idea of what they do, where and when they might be found, the sort of guns they carry and what they might be wearing - a sort of "Spotters' Guide to Shooters."

There is no such thing as the "standard" sporting shooter in the United Kingdom - they are all very different, and usually fiercely independent. They also tend to have a serious knowledge of safety and the law, so do remember that unless you are a sporting shooter yourself, it is likely that the person you are dealing with will know far more about guns and shooting than you do. That means any ill-informed or flippant comment could do a great deal of damage to the reputation of your force and the police service in general.

Even today, the murders at Hungerford and Dunblane have left the public nervous and likely to react to any sighting of a gun or gun-like object as though a similar massacre is about to re-occur - the "just in case" syndrome. Often, the complaint from the member of the public will relate to the shooter acting "furtively". On some occasions this will be the case, as to get in range of their quarry, (be it deer, pigeon, fox or rabbit,) requires a deal of fieldcraft, and stealth naturally forms the major part of this. . Complacency however, should never be an option.

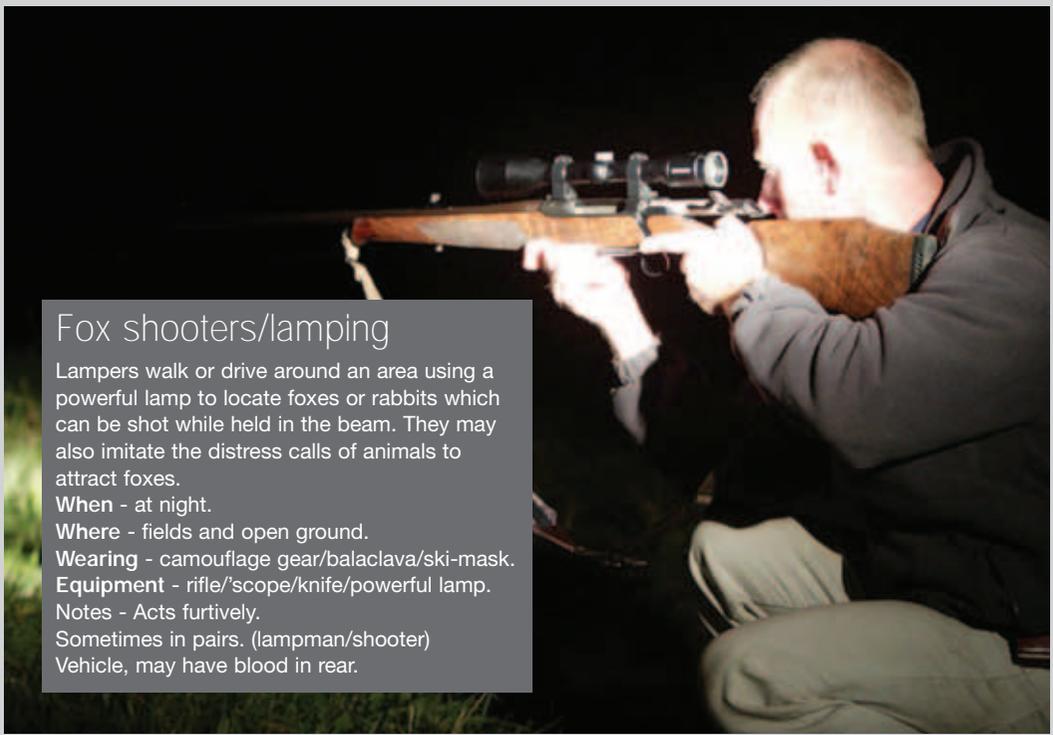
Having said that, there are many hundreds of thousands of law-abiding shooters in the country, and you are far more likely to meet one of these than an armed criminal or terrorist.

Armed police officers

The one common theme we at BASC see running through any confrontation between an armed police officer and a shooter is the lack of any apology or explanation to the innocent shooter once the situation has been resolved. We appreciate that this can be a tense situation, and does not always lend itself to calm appraisal and reflection. However, as a professional police officer you can do a great deal towards increasing respect for both yourself and the force if you take the time to talk calmly and quietly about the situation with the shooter after the event.

Remember that the shooter will be ready to criticise any poor gun-handling, and being well aware of the danger of having a loaded gun pointed at him, or her, will be feeling angry and upset. The MOST important rule of sporting gun safety is NEVER to point a gun at anyone, loaded or otherwise, and to have this rule "broken" deliberately is completely alien to shooters, particularly when they are the target.

This guide lists some of the more common forms of sports shooting, together with the guns, equipment, locations and actions of the shooters involved. Not everyone will conform to these parameters, as the choice of clothing, gun and equipment is largely a matter of personal choice.



Fox shooters/lamping

Lampers walk or drive around an area using a powerful lamp to locate foxes or rabbits which can be shot while held in the beam. They may also imitate the distress calls of animals to attract foxes.

When - at night.

Where - fields and open ground.

Wearing - camouflage gear/balaclava/ski-mask.

Equipment - rifle/scope/knife/powerful lamp.

Notes - Acts furtively.

Sometimes in pairs. (lampman/shooter)

Vehicle, may have blood in rear.



Game shooters

These are formal shoots – often quite up-market events – which are organised by the landowner or his agent.

When - during daytime.

Where - usually on estates, fields and woods.

Wearing - tweeds, waterproof clothing.

Equipment - shotgun, cartridge bag or belt.

Notes - will have dogs.

Gamekeeper, beaters etc. to support.

Vehicles. Well organised.

Rough shooters

Informal shoot involving a small group or individual usually on a single farm or estate.

When - usually daytime/dawn/early evening.

Where - fields and woods.

Wearing - a variety of different clothing, usually of discreet pattern and colour.

Equipment - shotgun, knife, game bag, cartridge belt, "priest" (small cosh)

Notes - may have dogs.

Solitary or in small groups.



Pest controllers

May be professional or amateur their quarry includes rats, crows and other species on the general (pest) licences.

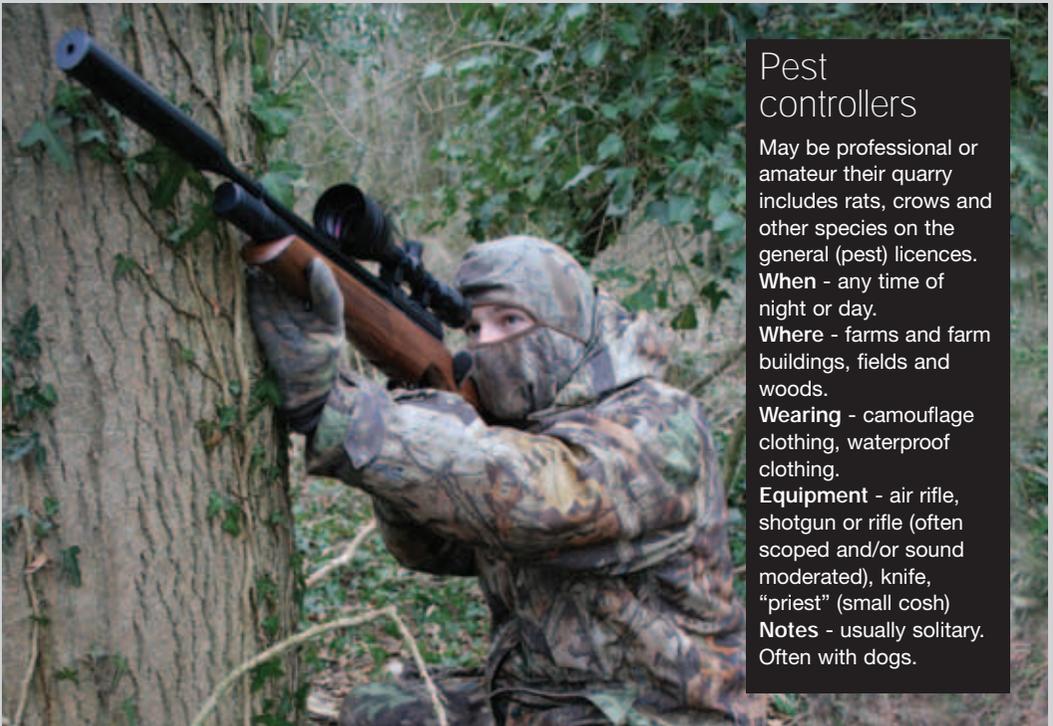
When - any time of night or day.

Where - farms and farm buildings, fields and woods.

Wearing - camouflage clothing, waterproof clothing.

Equipment - air rifle, shotgun or rifle (often scoped and/or sound moderated), knife, "priest" (small cosh)

Notes - usually solitary. Often with dogs.



Pigeon shooters

These provide an essential service to farmers throughout the country and are the commonest cause of reports of 'suspicious gunmen.' They often fire a large number of cartridges and to remain inconspicuous to the birds are heavily camouflaged and shoot from camouflaged or natural hides.

When - usually daytime/dawn/early evening.

Where - usually by hedges, in woods, coverts etc, occasionally in fields.

Wearing - balaclava/ face mask/ camouflage gear.

Equipment - shotguns, decoys (artificial birds), poles, hide equipment, knife (machete or billhook), "priest" (small cosh)

Notes - makes hides out of bales, vegetation, poles, sacking, camouflage netting etc.



Deer stalkers

Tend to operate in twilight and undisturbed areas frequented by deer. Seldom fire more than one shot but since deer are gralloched (gutted) in the field they may be blood-stained and carrying a carcass.

When - dawn and dusk.

Where - woodlands/field margins, sometimes in a high seat against a tree.

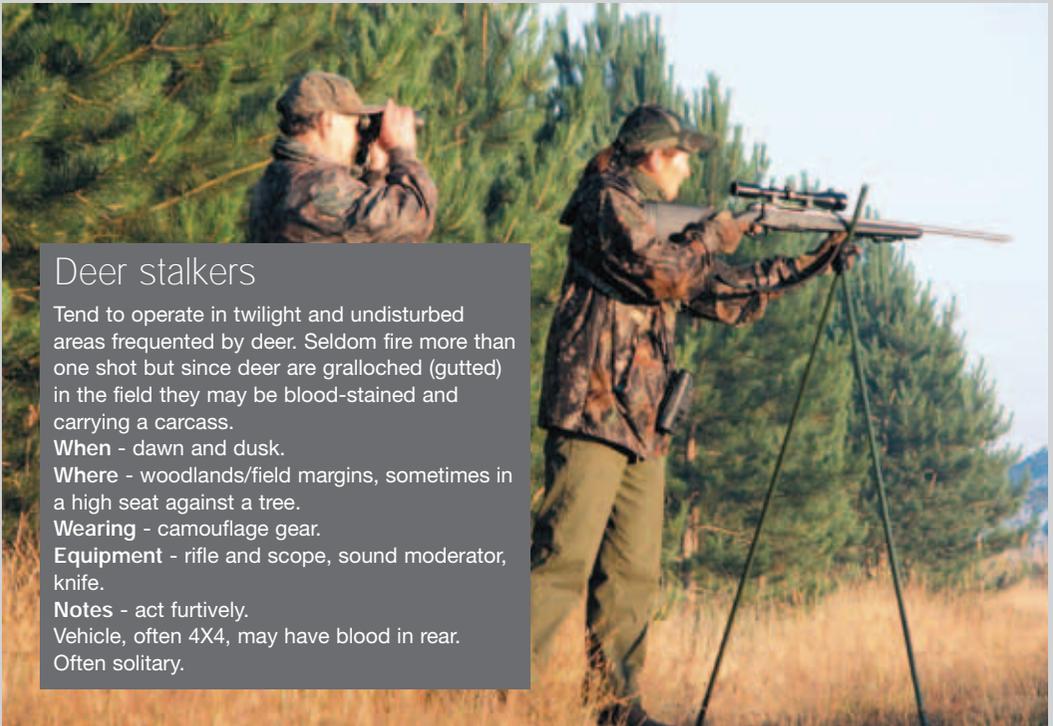
Wearing - camouflage gear.

Equipment - rifle and scope, sound moderator, knife.

Notes - act furtively.

Vehicle, often 4X4, may have blood in rear.

Often solitary.



Wildfowlers

Usually only encountered on the coast, often in darkness, getting in position before first light or returning after dusk. Principally shoot ducks and geese.

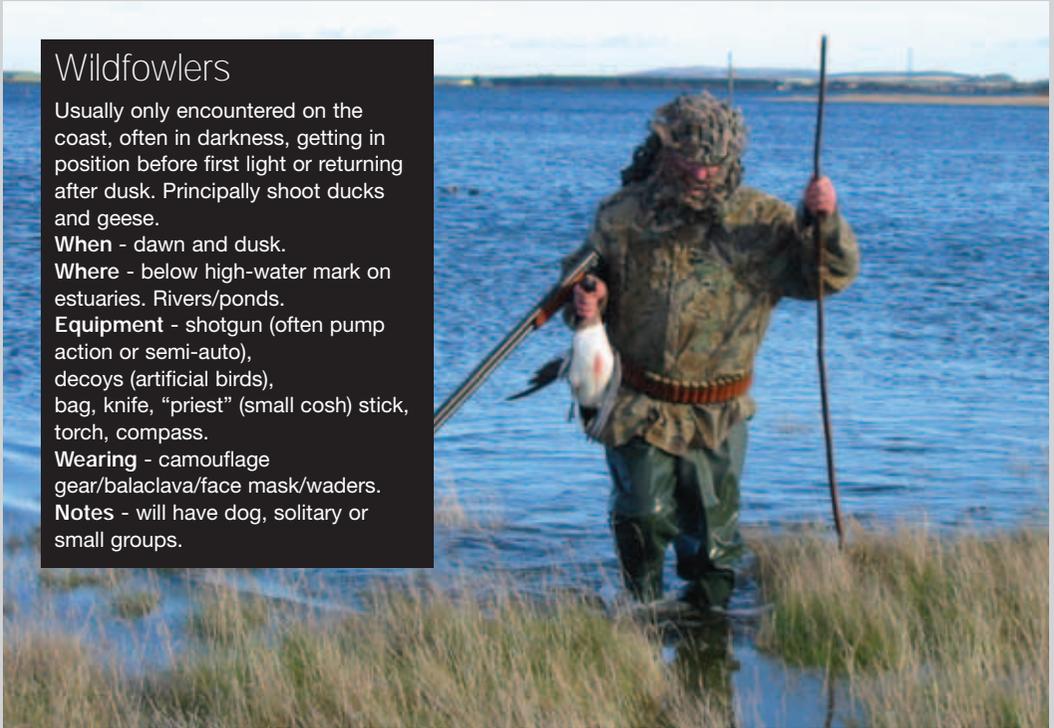
When - dawn and dusk.

Where - below high-water mark on estuaries. Rivers/ponds.

Equipment - shotgun (often pump action or semi-auto), decoys (artificial birds), bag, knife, "priest" (small cosh) stick, torch, compass.

Wearing - camouflage gear/balaclava/face mask/waders.

Notes - will have dog, solitary or small groups.



Target shooters

When - daytime/evening.

Where - club ranges, military ranges, travelling to/from club or range.

Wearing - casual dress.

Equipment - boxes of equipment/ammunition, pistols, air rifles or pistols, shotguns, rifles (scoped/unscoped) and gun powder.

Clay pigeon shooters

When - daytime.

Where - Rural or urban, travelling to/from established shooting grounds and clubs, or occasional events held on farms or estates.

Wearing - casual dress, shooting "waistcoat", peaked cap.

Equipment - shotguns, (usually over/under), many cartridges.

May have several guns.



This list is by no means inclusive, and many shooters will shoot a number of the activities listed above, with a number of different guns, wearing different clothing. We hope that these general descriptions will give you some idea of the types of legal shooting conducted throughout England and Wales, and as a consequence avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary confrontation.

If you have any queries about the shooting sports please don't hesitate to contact the BASC firearms department who will be happy to give you help and advice.

Mike Eveleigh, BASC Senior Firearms Officer, Research & Policy, 01244 573010



Head Office,
Marford Mill, Rossett,
Wrexham LL12 0HL
Tel: 01244 573000
Fax: 01244 573001
www.basc.org.uk
Email: firearms@basc.org.uk



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